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SIPDIS

BAGHDAD FOR AMBASSADOR ERELI

E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/11/2019
TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [KWBG](#) [KISL](#) [BA](#)
SUBJECT: BAHRAIN: MORE ON PROPOSED ISLAMIC SUMMIT ON GAZA;
IRANIAN ENVOY

REF: MANAMA 14

Classified By: A/DCM Steven R. Butler for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: MFA says Bahrain did not coordinate with others in advance of the King's call for an Arab -- or Islamic -- summit , and claimed that an impending visit by an Iranian envoy is not connected. End summary.

¶2. (C) Two senior MFA officials -- Ministerial advisor Saeed Al Fahani and Under Secretary Abdulaziz Al Khalifa -- told CDA separately that King Hamad's call January 8 for an Islamic summit on Gaza was a unilateral GOB gesture aimed at raising the profile of Bahrain's concern over events in Gaza, and mollifying domestic public opinion. Both claimed Bahrain had not coordinated with any other government or the OIC in advance of the King's statement. They reiterated concerns that events in Gaza were subjecting moderate Arab governments to pressure from emboldened oppositions, but thought it unlikely the proposal for an Islamic summit would gain much support.

¶3. (U) However, Iran's Embassy in Manama announced January 10 that a GOI envoy, Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance Mohamed Hussain Safar Hareendi would soon visit Bahrain and the UAE with messages on Gaza for heads of state. When a journalist asked the Iranian Embassy spokesman whether the message was a response to King Hamad's call for an Islamic summit, the spokesman said "Iran always supports such summits."

¶4. (C) MFA's Shaikh Abdulaziz told CDA the Iranian's visit had been planned for the previous week but postponed, and reiterated that the Iranians had not been informed in advance of the King's summit idea.

Positive Local Response

¶5. (SBU) The King's statement -- that an Islamic summit should discuss Gaza if it proved impossible to convene an Arab summit -- along with announcements January 8 of donations to Palestinian causes from the King's personal account, more government aid for Gaza, and offers of free treatment at Bahraini state hospitals for injured Gazans, were all well received in local mainstream media and on most blogs. These gestures also probably helped keep calm the large (for Bahrain) demonstrations Friday, January 9. Crowds hailed the King while denouncing Israel, the U.S., and Egypt:

--About 10,000 mostly Shia marchers demonstrated on Budaiya highway west of Manama. Shia Wifaq party contacts told us they worked successfully to ensure the marchers were disciplined and did not deface American or Israeli flags.

--3,000 mostly Sunnis gathered at a stadium on Muharraq island. Visitors to the Muharraq stadium were invited to walk across American flags painted on the ground.

--Smaller crowds ranging from a dozen to several hundred demonstrated outside most of Bahrain's mosques after Friday prayers.

--Authorities blocked two separate attempts to demonstrate at the Egyptian Embassy and ambassador's residence.

¶6. (C) Comment: The Bahrainis probably did intend their Islamic summit proposal as a sop to domestic opinion, but may have inadvertently created an opening for Iran.

Visit Embassy Manama's Classified Website:

<http://www.state.sgov.gov/p/nea/manama/>

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